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AUTHOR Lamberth, Edwin E.
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ABSTRACT

A study investigated perceptions of high school vocational agriculture teachers of supervised occupational experience programs (SOEPs) in Tennessee. Specific objectives were to determine school policies related to SOEPs, number of students and types of SOEPs, and perceptions of various aspects of SOEPs. Mailed surveys were completed by 84 of 214 teachers. Findings indicated that the average 1984-85 enrollment for the responding departments was 98 students. SOEPs were required for enrollment in 35 percent of the programs. Major factors that hindered vocational agriculture departments from having SOEPs were: too many students with weak agricultural background or inadequate resources; large student-teacher ratios; and competing school activities. Departments with a high percentage of students in Future Farmers of America (FFA) had a high percentage of FFA members completing SOEPs. Five objectives for SOEP were rated above average in importance: enhance classroom instruction, develop management skills, prepare students for careers in agriculture/agribusiness, provide a link between vocational agriculture and FFA, and build character. Production agriculture was the most common type of SOEP conducted by students. Supervised farming programs and placement on farms were major types of SOEP alternatives teachers rated as most suitable. Teachers felt that the SOEP assistance they provided students was inadequate. (The instrument is appended.) (YLB)

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DETERMINING PERCEPTIONS OF VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE TEACHERS TOWARD SUPERVISED OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCE PROGRAMS IN TENNESSEE

by

Edwin B. Lamberth

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INTRODUCTION

The supervised occupational experience program (SOEP) has been recognized by agricultural education as an inseparable component of the vocational agriculture program since the inception of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917. Vocational agriculture programs have undergone many changes through the years, but its advocates have always maintained that the concept of learning by doing is central to the program. Through SOEP students "learn by doing" by applying agricultural knowledge and skills studied in the classroom to a practical, useful occupational experience.

Yet, in the early 1980's, there was widespread concern that the quality of SOEP's was declining, the commitment to them was lessening and the attitude of teachers toward SOEP and its supervision was declining.

The author could find no data regarding the vitality of the SOE programs in Tennessee. Hence, the author sought to determine the perceptions of vocational agriculture teachers in Tennessee regarding SOE programs in their high school communities.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study was designed to determine the perceptions of high school vocational agriculture teachers of supervised occupational experience programs in Tennessee. The specific objectives were to determine the following:

(1) School policies related to SOEP's.

(2) Number of students and types of SOEP's.

(3) Perceptions of various aspects of SOEP's.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Occupational Objective - A specific occupational goal selected by the student that serves as a guide in developing an SOE program.

Policy - A general principle of operation for SOE programs adopted by local and state boards of education.

Supervised Occupational Experience Program - A series of related learning experiences which are an intergral part of the instructional program of a student enrolled in vocational agriculture, designed to develop knowledge and skills in agriculture. These supervised learning experiences may be promoted by utilizing facilities of the home, farm, school, or an agribusiness.

Supervised Occupational Experience Program Alternative - An SOE program may include any of the following types of experiences: School farm or school laboratory activities, supervised farming or agribusiness program, placement for farm or agribusiness experience, or on-the-job cooperative agricultural training.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of the literature revealed the importance of supervised occupational experience programs to vocational agriculture. Peterson and McCreight (1973) stated that "one of the first requirements of an agricultural educator is to have a real dedication and commitment to a supervised occupational experience program for every student. The 'heart and backbone' of a vocational agriculture curriculum is the supervised occupational experience program." Other researchers who have written about the importance of SOE include Williams (1978), Long (1982), and McCormick (1982).

Binkley (1977) toured vocational agriculture departments in 12 states in

1975 and expressed concern that SOE programs may have decreased to a low level of quality. Research by Iverson and Brown (1979), in the southern part of the United States, found that nearly two-thirds of the vocational agriculture graduates did not have SOE programs. In addition, studies by Vaughn (1982) in New Mexico, and by Hambee (1983), in Texas revealed that less than 100 percent of the students enrolled in vocational agriculture had SOE programs.

Although agricultural educators have, in the main, been committed to involving all students in SOE, many educators in Tennessee and throughout the United States have begun to question the quality, quantity, and integral nature of the experience component of vocational agriculture programs. In response to this need, the researcher developed a study to determine the perceptions of teachers relative to the participation of students in SOEP's in Tennessee.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The population for this study consisted of all Tennessee schools having vocational agriculture programs as listed in the 1984 Agriculture Teachers Directory. In order to obtain the data, a survey instrument was developed and refined by the Tennessee Joint Staff for Agricultural Education. The survey instrument, a cover letter from Mr. Kenneth K. Mitchell, Head State Specialist for Agricultural Education, explaining the study and a self-addressed stamped envelope were mailed to 214 teachers of vocational agriculture on January 31, 1985. A follow-up letter was sent to teachers who had not responded on April 3, 1985. Eighty-eight teachers (41.1 percent) completed and returned the survey instrument. (A copy of the survey instrument, cover letter, and follow-up letter in are the appendix.) Analysis of data pertaining to the purpose included the calculations of frequencies and means.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This section presents the data that identifies the high school vocational agriculture teachers' perceptions of supervised occupational experience programs (SOEP's). The results are presented in Tables 1 through 16.

The teachers' responses to policy questions related to SOEP's in Tennessee are shown in Table 1. Only 35 percent of the teachers stated that an SOEP was required for enrollment in vocational agriculture in their high schools, and only 48 percent reported that the schools provided SOEP facilities for those student without adequate facilities at home. More than 96 percent of the teachers are employed during summer months, but only 77 percent were provided a vehicle or compensation for visiting SOEP's. Less than 20 percent were provided SOE visitation time during the school day.

The Rules and Minimum Standards for the Governance of Public Schools in Tennessee (1984) states that "a student who has an approved supervised occupational experience program consisting of a minimum of 175 hours will be given an additional one-half unit of credit under the provision of out-of-school experience." Only 18 percent of the teachers reported that this rule was followed in their schools.

Table 2 shows the number of students enrolled in vocational agriculture in 1984-85. Thirty-four percent of the department reported an enrollment between 76 and 100 students. However, 35 percent had an enrollment of over 101 students. The average enrollment for the

Table 1. School Policies Related to Supervised Occupational Experience Programs in Tennessee Vocational Agriculture Departments, 1984-85.

Policy Questions	Teachers' Responses			
	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Is a SOEP required for enrollment of students in Vo-Ag in your department?	31	35.2	57	64.8
Do students with a minimum of 175 hours in his/her SOEP receive 1/2 unit of credit under the provision of out-of-school experience?	16	18.2	72	81.8
Does the school provide facilities for those students without adequate facilities at home to have SOEP's?	42	47.7	46	52.3
Does the school provide you a vehicle (or compensate for the use of yours) for visiting SOEP's?	68	77.3	20	22.7
Are you employed during the summer months?	85	96.6	3	3.4
Does the school provide visitation time for you during the school day?	17	19.3	71	80.7
Do the students in both Vo-Ag and 4-H have separate SOEP for each youth program?	25	28.4	63	71.6

Table 2. Number of Students Enrolled in Vocational Agriculture Departments in 1984-85.

Enrollment	Departments N	%
1 to 25 students	2	2.3
26 to 50 students	7	8.0
51 to 75 students	18	20.5
76 to 100 students	30	34.1
101 to 125 students	16	18.2
126 to 150 students	3	3.4
151 to 175 students	4	4.5
176 to 200 students	4	4.5
201 to 225 students	4	4.5
Total	88	100.0
Average Enrollment = 98		

departments was 98 students.

There were great variations, as revealed by Table 3, in the percentage of students enrolled in vocational agriculture with supervised occupational experience programs in 1984-85. Thirty-one percent of the departments reported that none of their students had SOEP's. Only nine percent of the departments indicated that 90 to 100 percent of their students conducted SOEP's. The average percentage of vocational agriculture students with SOEP's in 1984-85 was only 38.1 percent.

Table 4 shows the percentage of students' grades in vocational agriculture coming from their supervised occupational experience programs in 1984-85. Thirty-one percent of the departments did not consider SOEP's in grading students. Twenty-seven percent of the department reported that students' SOEP's accounting for 10 percent of the grade in vocational agriculture. Only nine percent of the departments allowed the SOEP's to make up 30 percent or more of the students' grades. However, approximately 14 percent did indicate that they used other evaluating procedures, other than percentages, in calculating SOEP's grades.

The percentage of vocational agriculture students living on farms is shown in Table 5. Approximately three percent of the departments reported that none of their students lived on farms, and only three percent of the departments reported that between 81 to 100 percent of their students lived on farms. More than 85 percent of the departments indicated that less than 61 percent of the students enrolled in vocational agriculture lived on farms. The percentage of vocational agriculture students living on farms in 1984-85 was 33.5 percent.

Table 6 reveals the percentage of vocational agriculture students, according to their teachers, without adequate facilities at home for SOEP

Table 3. Percentage of Students Enrolled in Vocational Agriculture Departments with Supervised Occupational Experience Programs, 1984-85.

Percent Students with SOEP	Departments	
	N	%
0% (No SOEP's)	27	30.7
1 to 9%	4	4.5
10 to 19%	6	6.8
20 to 29%	6	6.8
30 to 39%	1	1.1
40 to 49%	8	9.1
50 to 59%	9	10.2
60 to 69%	2	2.3
70 to 79%	13	14.8
80 to 89%	4	4.5
90 to 100%	8	9.1
Total	88	100.0
Average % = 38.1		

Table 4. Percentage of Students' Grades in Vocational Agriculture Coming from Their Supervised Occupational Experience Programs, 1984-85.

Percent Grade from SOEP	Departments	
	N	%
None	27	30.7
10%	24	27.3
20%	17	19.3
30%	5	5.7
40%	2	2.3
More than 40%	1	1.1
Others	12	13.6
Total	88	100.0

Table 5. Percentage of Vocational Agriculture Students Living on Farms, 1984-85.

Percent Students Living on Farms	Departments	
	N	%
None	3	3.4
1 to 20%	24	27.3
21 to 40%	25	28.4
41 to 60%	26	29.5
61 to 80%	7	8.0
81 to 100%	3	3.4
Total	88	100.0
Average % = 33.5		

Table 6. Percentage of Vocational Agriculture Students Without Adequate Facilities at Home for Supervised Occupational Experience Programs, 1984-85.

Percent Students Without Facilities	Departments	
	N	%
None	2	2.3
1 to 20%	20	22.7
21 to 40%	20	22.7
41 to 60%	22	25.0
61 to 80%	15	17.1
81 to 100%	9	10.2
Total	88	100.0
Average % = 40.9		

in 1984-85. Twenty-seven percent of the departments reported that between 61 and 100 percent of their students did not have adequate home facilities for supervised occupational experience programs. Forty-five percent of the departments indicated that less than 41 percent of their students had adequate facilities for SOEP's. The average percentage of vocational agriculture students without adequate facilities at home for SOEP's in 1984-85 was 40.9 percent.

The number of hours provided teachers during the school day for visiting supervised occupational experience programs is shown in Table 7. Forty-five percent of the teachers indicated that no time was provided during the school day to visit SOEP's; and only 19 percent indicated that they had from one and half hours to thirty minutes to visit SOEP's. The average number of hours provided for visiting SOEP's during the school day was 0.2 hours.

Table 8 summarizes the number of supervisory visits made per year by the teachers to each student enrolled in vocational agriculture. The largest number, 78 percent, made between one and two visits. Only 18 percent of the teachers visited each student between 3 and 6 times. The average number of supervisory visits made by the teachers to each student in 1984-85 was 1.9 visits.

The teachers ranked seven factors, from 1 to 7 with number 1 being the most important, which prevented departments of vocational agriculture from having supervised occupational experience programs. These seven factors and their mean scores are shown in Table 9. Four of the factors had a mean score below 3.50 (above average in importance). These were: too many students with weak agricultural background, too many students with inadequate resources, large student-teacher ratios, and competing school

Table 7. Number of Hours Provided During the School Day for Visitation to Supervised Occupational Experience Programs, 1984-85.

Hours Provided	Departments	
	N	%
None	40	45.4
Half hour	2	2.3
One hour	13	14.8
One and a half hours	2	2.3
Two hours	---	---
Saturdays	1	1.1
After school	8	9.1
Not applicable	6	6.8
No response	16	18.2
Total	88	100.0
Average Hours = 0.2		

Table 8. Average Number of Visits Per Year to Each Student Enrolled in Vocational Agriculture, 1984-85.

Average Number Visits	Departments	
	N	%
0 to 0.9 visits	3	3.4
1 to 2 visits	69	78.4
3 to 4 visits	15	17.1
5 to 6 visits	1	1.1
Total	88	100.0
Average visits = 1.9		

Table 9. Importance Teachers Placed on Factors Preventing Departments from Having Supervised Occupational Experience Programs, 1984-85.

Factors	Mean Scores*
Too many students with weak agricultural background.	2.06
Too many students with inadequate resources	3.69
Large student-teacher ratios.	3.73
Competing school activities.	3.92
Too many students with low academic ability.	4.26
Limited funds for supervision.	4.38
Others	5.11

*Teachers ranked factors from 1 to 7, with number 1 being the most important.

activities. Some of the other factors with mean scores above 3.50 (below average importance) were: too many students with low academic ability, limited funds for supervision, low student interest, low parent interest, agriculture not important, poor teacher schedule, and philosophy of guidance counselors toward vocational agriculture.

Table 10 shows the percentage of vocational agriculture students belonging to the FFA and the percentage of FFA members with supervised occupational experience program. Sixty-six percent of the departments reported an FFA membership between 90 and 100 percent. Forty-one percent of the FFA members in these departments had SOEP's. In the departments with less than 41 percent FFA membership, only 20 percent had SOEP's. The average percentage of students belonging to the FFA was 85 percent and the percentage of FFA members with SOEP's was 68. (The reader should compare the data in Tables 3 and 10.)

Most of the requirements for the FFA State Farmer degree are related to achievements in supervised occupational experiences. The number of State Farmer degree applications submitted by the departments of vocational agriculture to the State FFA Advisor in 1984-85 are summarized in Table 11. Twenty-seven percent of the departments did not submit any State Farmer degree applications; and 32 percent submitted only 1 to 3 applications. Sixteen percent of the departments filed between 7 and 12 degree applications. The average number of State Farmer degree applications submitted by the departments in 1984-85 was 3.5.

The teachers were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with various parts of a definition of supervised occupational experience program. Their ratings were transferred to a five point scale - (5) strongly agree, (4) agree, (3) no opinion, (2) disagree, (1) strongly

Table 10. Percentage of Vocational Agriculture Enrollment Belonging to the FFA and Percentage of FFA Members with Supervised Occupational Experience Programs, 1984-85.

Percent Members	Belong to FFA		With SOEP	
	N	%	N	%
None	---	---	1	1.1
1 to 10%	---	---	3	3.4
11 to 20%	1	1.1	6	6.8
21 to 30%	---	---	4	4.5
31 to 40%	3	3.4	4	4.5
41 to 50%	3	3.4	10	11.4
51 to 60%	2	2.3	5	5.7
61 to 70%	5	5.7	4	4.5
71 to 80%	6	6.8	7	8.0
81 to 90%	10	11.4	8	9.1
91 to 100%	58	65.9	36	40.9
Total	88	100.0	88	100.0
Average %	85.2		67.7	

Table 11. State Farmer Degree Application Submitted to the State FFA Advisor in 1984-85.

Number of Applications	Department	
	N	%
None	24	27.3
1 to 3	28	31.7
4 to 6	22	25.0
7 to 9	5	5.7
10 to 12	9	10.2
Total	88	100.0
Average number = 3.5		

disagree - and mean ratings were calculated for each part of the definition. As shown in Table 12, the teachers agreed with all parts of the SOEP definition; with mean scores ranging from 4.43 to 4.11. "SOEP is used to help prepare students for careers in agriculture/agribusiness" received the highest rating (4.43), and "SOEP should reflect the agriculture/agribusiness employment needs of the area and region" received the lowest rating (4.11). "SOEP may be considered a multipurpose enterprise or activity carried on outside of the regular classroom by vocational agriculture students and supervised by instructors, parents, and employers" received a mean score of 4.39 and "SOEP is used primarily to enhance the student's appreciation for and the learning of modern agriculture/agribusiness" received a mean rating of 4.23.

The teachers were requested to rate the importance that they placed on objectives for supervised occupational experience programs. They rated the objectives from 1 to 8 with number 1 being the most important. The objectives and mean ratings are shown in Table 13. Five objectives received mean scores below 4.00 (above average in importance). These objectives were: enhance classroom instruction, develop management skills, provide a link between vocational agriculture and the FFA, and build character. Some of the other objectives for SOE proposed by the teachers were financial profit, recognition of FFA/Vo-Ag department, keep students in Vo-Ag department, help student make career choices based on experiences, build better student attitudes, recognition of hard working students, and provide cooperative credit to students.

The teachers were asked to list the percentage of students by types of supervised occupational experience programs that they conducted in 1985. The types of SOE programs and percentage of students conducting each type

Table 12. Level of Agreement Teachers Placed on Various Parts of a Definition of Supervised Occupational Experience Program, 1984-85.

Part of SOEP Definition	Percent of Teachers					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Mean Ratings*
SOEP is used to help prepare students for careers in agriculture/agribusiness.	46.6	51.2	1.1	1.1	---	4.43
SOEP may be considered a multipurpose enterprise or activity carried on outside the regular classroom by vocational agriculture students and supervised by instructors, parents, and employers.	48.9	46.6	---	3.4	1.1	4.39
SOEP is used primarily to enhance the student's appreciation for and the learning of modern agriculture/agribusiness.	35.2	56.8	3.4	4.5	---	4.23
SOEP should reflect the agriculture/agribusiness employment needs of the area and region.	31.8	56.8	3.4	6.8	1.1	4.11

*Ratings were transferred to a five point scale - Strongly agree (5), Agree (4), No opinion (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

Table 13. Importance Teachers Placed on Objectives for Supervised Occupational Experience Programs, 1984-85.

Objectives	Mean Scores*
Enhance classroom instruction (hands-on experience)	2.08
Management skills	3.10
Establishment in agriculture/ agribusiness	3.91
Provide a link between Vo-ag and FFA	3.94
Character building	3.95
Financial profit	4.63
FFA/Vo-ag department recognition	6.04
Others	7.76

*Teachers ranked objectives from 1 to 8, with number 1 being the most important.

are shown in Table 14. Various farm production agriculture enterprises were the most common types of SOEP's. The types of farm production SOE programs and percentage of teachers listing each were commercial crop production (78%), commercial livestock production (72%), dairy (60%), terminal livestock projects (53%), and breeding livestock projects (53%). Other types of SOE programs listed and the percentage of the teachers indicating each were agricultural mechanics (68%), horticulture (45%), forestry (41%) and agrichemicals and supplies (37%). The teachers were asked to write in other types of SOE programs conducted by their students. The major ones listed were agricultural supplies and services, bee production, small animal production, fast food outlets, retail food stores, fruit and vegetable production, poultry production, meat processing, turfgrass and landscaping, and cooperative programs.

Table 15 compares the type of SOE assistance that the teachers felt were needed and the types of SOE assistance that they actually provided in 1984-85. The types of assistance were responded to on a five-point scale with a rating of five (5) considered high level of performance and need; likewise, a rating of one (1) was considered a low level of performance and need. Mean responses were determined for each type of SOE assistance.

The means for the 15 types of SOE assistance actually provided by the teachers, ranged from 3.67 to 2.11 and the means for the types of SOE assistance that they felt should have been provided or needed ranged from 4.33 to 2.83. The differences between means for the 15 types of SOE assistance varied from 1.15 to 0.35, with the greatest differences for "developing parental involvement in SOEP," "keeping records on SOEP," correlating career goals with SOEP training," "class time spent in planning and selecting SOEP plans," and "developing short and long range SOEP

Table 14. Types of Students' Supervised Occupational Experience Program as Reported by the Teachers in 1985.

Types of SOE Program	Numbers fo Teachers by % Catergories Reporting Each Type						Teachers	
	1-15%	16-30%	31-45%	46-50%	51-75%	More than 75%	N	%
Commercial crop production	26	29	10	3	1	---	69	78.4
Commercial livestock production	20	31	6	5	1	---	63	71.6
Agricultural Mechanics	49	8	1	2	---	---	60	68.2
Horticulture	33	10	7	1	---	6	57	64.8
Dairy	43	8	2	---	---	---	53	60.2
Terminal livestock exhibition (boars, steers, etc.)	30	11	5	1	---	---	47	53.4
Breeding livestock exhibition (boars, gilts, bulls, heifers, etc.)	31	11	5	---	---	---	47	53.4
Forestry	36	---	---	---	---	---	36	40.9
Agricultural chemicals and supplies	30	3	---	---	---	---	33	37.5
Others	13	6	3	---	1	6	23	26.1

Table 15. Supervised Occupational Experience Assistance that Teachers Felt was needed and Assistance that They Actually Provided in 1984-85.

Types of Assistance	Mean Scores*		
	Should Be Provided by Teachers	Provided by Teachers	Difference
Developing parental involvement in SOEP.	3.76	2.61	1.15
Keeping records on SOEP.	4.06	3.15	0.91
Correlating career goals with SOEP traning.	3.28	2.43	0.85
Class time spent in planning and selecting SOEP.	3.59	2.75	0.84
Developing short and long range SOEP plans.	3.56	2.72	0.84
Helping students physically expand SOEP. (Find land for expansion, etc.)	2.83	2.11	0.72
Selecting/procuring livestock and crops.	3.28	2.57	0.71
Selecting placement stations in agribusiness.	3.33	2.63	0.70
Evaluating SOEP.	3.68	3.01	0.67
Class time spent on management practices.	3.64	3.10	0.54
Setting related educational goals.	3.43	2.90	0.53
Providing equipment for SOEP. (Facilities, trailers, or tools)	2.92	2.42	0.50
Providing transportation for SOEP activities.	2.84	2.40	0.44
Correlating SOEP with FFA awards and/or activities.	3.59	3.24	0.35
Others	4.33	3.67	0.66

*Ratings based on a five-point scale, with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest.

plans." The teachers were required to list and rate other types of SOE assistance that they provided and felt were needed. Three teachers specified "securing funds for SOEP", "encouraging yard cutting," and "day labor work."

The teachers were asked to rank various alternatives for supervised occupational experience programs for their school communities. The SOEP alternatives were ranked on a six-point scale with a ranking of (1) being the most effective alternative for their community and a six (6) being the least effective alternative. The SOEP alternatives and mean rankings for each are shown in Table 16. The mean ranking varied from 2.03 to 5.52. The two SOEP alternatives with the highest ratings were a supervised farming program on home farms and placement on farms other than home farms. Three other SOEP alternatives received mean scores above 3.00. They were: supervised agribusiness program in family business (3.24), occupational experience in Vo-Ag laboratories (3.43), and placement in agribusiness other than family owned business (3.44). Six SOEP alternatives were listed and rated by 25 teachers. The six alternatives were: hired as laborers, placed outside of community, placed in cooperative projects, involved in garden and landscaping projects, worked in school farm labortory, and a combination of work at home and on other farms. Mean score for these six alternatives was 5.52.

FINDINGS

In interpreting and judging the findings of this study, the reader should consider the low return (41.1 percent) of the survey instrument used. However, the researchers feels that the following findings are based

Table 16. Teachers' Ranking of Supervised Occupational Experience Program Alternatives for Their School Community, 1984-85.

SOEP Alternatives	Mean Ratings*
Supervised farming program on home farm.	2.03
Placed on farms other than home farm.	2.99
Supervised agribusiness program in family business.	3.24
Occupational experience in vo-ag laboratories.	3.43
Placed in agribusiness other than family owned business.	3.44
Others.	5.52

*Teachers ranked alternatives from 1 to 6, with number 1 being the most effective for their community.

on the preceding data:

1. Average enrollment in 1984-85 for the departments of vocational agriculture responding to the survey was 98 students. Thirty-five perent of the teachers stated that supervised occupational experience programs (SOEP's) were required for enrollment in vocational agriculture. The percentage of students with SOEP's in 1985 was 38.1 percent.

2. More than 96 percent of the teachers were employed during the summer months, but only 77 percent were provided a vehicle or travel compensation by local school systems for visiting SOEP's. Average number of hours provided the teachers for supervisory visits to SOEP's during the school day was 0.2 hours; and the average number of supervisory visits made by the teachers in 1984-85 to each student was 1.9 visits.

3. Average percentage of vocational agriculture students living on farms in 1984-85 was 33.5 percent. Forty-one percent of the students did not have adequate facilities at home for SOEP's.

4. Major factors which hindered departments of vocational agriculture from having SOEP's were too many students with weak agricultural background, too many students with inadequate resources, large student-teacher ratios, and competing school activities.

5. Departments with a high percentage of students belonging to the Future Farmers of America (FFA) had a high percentage of FFA members completing SOEP's. Average percent of students belong to the FFA in 1984-85 was 85 and the percentage of FFA members with SOEP's was 68 percent. Average

number of State Farmer degree applications submitted by the Department of Vocational Agriculture was 3.5.

6. Five objectives for SOEP were rated above average in importance by the teachers. These were enhance classroom instruction, develop management skills, establishment in agriculture/agribusiness, provide a link between vocational agriculture and the FFA, and build character.

7. Production agriculture was the most common type of SOEP conducted by students in 1985. Supervised farming programs and placement on farms other than home farms were the two major types of SOEP alternatives that the teachers rated as most suitable for their school communities.

8. Teachers felt that the SOE assistance they provided their students was inadequate. All 15 types of SOE assistance provided by the teachers received mean ratings of 3.67 to 2.11 and all 15 types of SOE assistance that the teachers felt were needed received mean ratings of 4.33 to 2.83. Differences between mean scores for the 15 types of assistance ranged from 1.15 or 0.35.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study suggest several implications for vocational agriculture in Tennessee. Some of the implications for the on-going program of vocational agriculture are:

1. Local school superintendents and vocational education directors should

enforce the State Rules, Regulations, and Minimum Standards (1984) related to supervised occupational experience programs. These rules, regulations, and standards are: (a) a student who does not develop plans for an approved SOEP during the first year will not be permitted to enroll for a second year of vocational agriculture, (b) a student who has an approved SOEP consisting of a minimum of 175 hours will be given an additional one-half unit of credit under the provision of out-of-school experience, (c) the scope of an SOEP may vary according to the ability and situation of the student and will be in accord with the student's occupational objectives, and (d) the teacher shall be responsible for planning, developing, and supervising, and/or coordinating the SOEP's of students throughout the year.

2. The teachers of vocational agriculture should (a) develop local standards for approved SOEP's, (b) devote more instructional time to planning, conducting, evaluating, and expanding SOEP's, (c) determine various SOEP alternatives for their school communities, (d) recruit students with an interest in agriculture/agribusiness and with adequate resources for SOEP's, (e) encourage more vocational agriculture students to join the FFA, (f) be given at least one period during the school day and sufficient time in the summer to supervise and/or coordinate SOEP's, and (g) be provided adequate travel funds to supervise and/or coordinate SOEP's.

3. Findings of this study should be used by the Joint State Staff for Agricultural Education in Tennessee to design and develop in-service teacher training programs related to SOEP.

4. Findings of this study should be used by teacher educators in Tennessee to improve pre-service and in-service training programs in SOEP.

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APPENDIX

COVER LETTER

MEMORANDUM

TO: Teachers of Vocational Agriculture

FROM: Kenneth K. Mitchell K.K.M
Head State Specialist
Agricultural Education & FFA

DATE: January 31, 1985

REASON: A STUDY OF TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF SUPERVISED OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCE PROGRAMS IN TENNESSEE

Dr. Edwin Lamberth, Associate Professor of Agricultural Education at Tennessee Technological University, is making a study of the teacher perceptions of SOEP's in his/her high school curriculum. The research is being funded by Tennessee Tech Faculty Reasearch Committee..

From the inception of vocational agriculture through the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, SOEP's have recieved major emphasis in the training of future agriculturalists. But none the less, little research has been done concerning the overall success and teacher perception of SOEP's in the high schools. This is an effort in that direction.

Would you please complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to Dr. Lamberth by February 28, 1985. Your responses will be treated in a confidential manner. At no time will you or your department be identified in the research report. A self-addressed, stamped envelope is enclosed for returning the questionnaire.

Filling out questionnaires takes time, so your prompt attention to this matter will be greatly appreciated. Please share your ideas and difficulties.

Enclosures

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF VARIOUS ASPECTS
OF SUPERVISED OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCE PROGRAMS (SOEP)
IN TENNESSEE VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENTS.

A. General Information and School Policy

1. How many students are enrolled in Vocational Agriculture in your department this year? _____
2. Is a SOEP required for enrollment of students in Vo. Ag. in your department? yes_____ no_____
3. If SOEP is not required, estimate the percentage of students with SOEP's. _____
4. Do students with a minimum of 175 hours in his SOEP recieve ½ unit of credit under the provision of out-of-school experience? yes_____ no_____
5. What part of the student's grade comes from their SOEP?
   0%_____ 10%_____ 20%_____ 30%_____ 40%_____
   more than 40%_____ Other (explain)_____
   _____
6. What percentage of your Vo-Ag students live on farms? _____%
7. What percentage of your students don't have adequate facilities at home to have a SOEP? _____%
8. Does the school provide the facilities for these students' SOEP's? yes_____ no_____
9. Does the school provide you a vehicle (or compensate you for the use of yours) for visiting SOEP's? yes___ no___
10. Are you employed during the summer months? yes___ no___
11. Does the school provide visitation time for you during the school day? yes_____ no_____
12. What hour(s) of the school day is this time provided? _____
13. What is the average number of visits per year to each student? _____
14. Rank in order from 1 (one) to 7 (seven) (number one being most important), the following factors which may cause a Vo-Ag department not to have SOEP's:
    _____ Limited funds for supervision.
    _____ Large student-teacher ratios.
    _____ Too many students enrolled with weak agricultural background.
    _____ Too many students with low academic ability.
    _____ Competing school activities.
    _____ Too many students with inadequate resources.
    _____ Other (specify) _____

B. Student Participation and Types of SOEPs

1. What percent of your vocational agriculture enrollment belongs to FFA? _____%
2. What percent of the students that are members of FFA have SOEPs? _____%

3. How many State Farmer Applicants did you submit this past year? _____

4. Do the students that you have that are in both Vo-Ag and 4-H have seperate SOEP for each youth program? yes_____ no_____

C. Teacher Perceptions

1. Indicate the degree of agreement you have regarding the various parts of the following definition of a supervised occupational experience program:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The SOEP should reflect the agriculture/ agribusiness employment needs of the area and region.....					
A SOEP may be considered a multipurpose enterprise or activity carried on outside the regular classroom by vocational agriculture students and supervised by vocational agriculture instructors, parents, and employers...					
It is used primarily to enhance the student's appreciation for and the learning of modern agriculture/agribusiness.....					
It is also to help prepare the students for careers in agriculture/agribusiness.....					

2. Rank in order from one(1) to eight(8) (No. 1 being most important), the following as to how you feel they would rate in relation to their importance as an SOEP Program Objective:

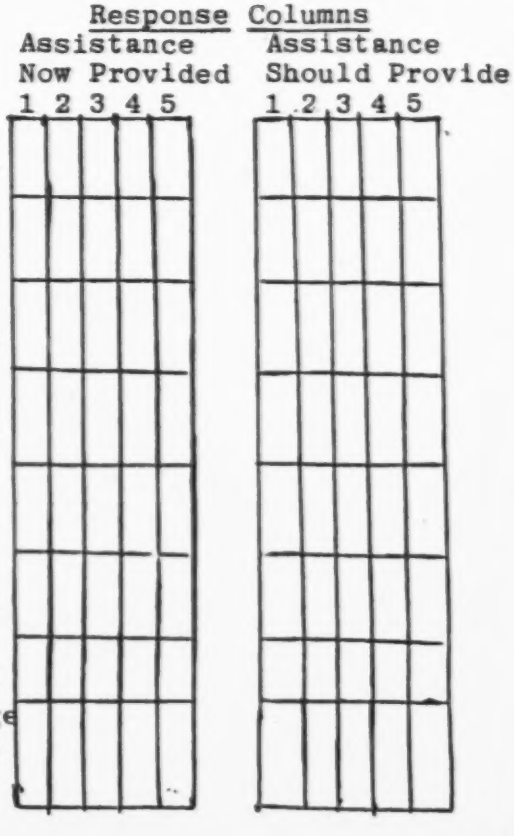
_____ Enhance Classroom instruction (hands on experience)
_____ Provide link between Vo-Ag and F.F.A.
_____ Financial Profit
_____ Character Building
_____ Management Skills
_____ FFA/Vo-Ag Department Recognition
_____ Establishment in Agriculture/Agribusiness
_____ Other (Specify) _____

3. List the percent of your students in each SOEP categories below. Be sure all your SOEPs fall into one of the categories. (Make sure your listings total 100%)

Categories:

_____ 1) Commercial livestock production
_____ 2) Terminal Livestock Exhibition (Terminal animals: barrows, steers, wethers, etc.)
_____ 3) Breeding Livestock Exhibition (Breeding animals: ewes, rams, boars, gilts, bulls, heifers)
_____ 4) Commercial crop production
_____ 5) Agricultural mechanics
_____ 6) Forestry
_____ 7) Dairy
_____ 8) Horticulture
_____ 9) Agricultural chemical and supplies
_____ 10) Other (specify) _____
100% Total

4. Give each of the following statements a numerical value from one (1) to five (5) as increased importance is felt. Place a mark in the desired numerical response column. Answers in "Assistance Now Provided" indicates the amount of assistance you feel you now provide your students' SOEPs. Column " Assistance Should Provide" indicates the amount of assistance you feel you should (or feel obligated) to provide. Place rating marks in the appropriate box at the right. Range of answers Low 12345 High.



1) Class time spent in planning and selecting SOEP.....
2) Developing parental involvement in SOEP.....
3) Correlating career goals with SOEP training.....
4) Correlating SOEP with FFA awards and/or activities.....
5) Selecting/procuring livestock and crops.....
6) Selecting Placement Stations in agribusiness.....
7) Record keeping on SOEP.....
8) Developing short and long range SOEP plans.....

(4 Cont.)

	Response Columns: Assistance Now Provided (1 2 3 4 5)	Response Columns: Assistance Should Provide (1 2 3 4 5)
9) Providing transportation for SOEP activities.....		
10) Providing equipment (facilities/ trailers/tools) for SOEP.....		
11) Evaluation of SOEP.....		
12) Class time spent on management practices.....		
13) Setting related educational goals.....		
14) Helping students physically expand SOEP (find land for expansion, etc.).....		
15) Other (specify) _____ _____		

5. Rank in order from one (1) to six (6) (no. 1 being the most effective) the following SOEP alternatives for your school community:

_____ Supervised farming program on home farm.
_____ Supervised agribusiness program in family business.
_____ Placed on farms other than home farms.
_____ Placed in agribusiness other than family owned business.
_____ Occupational experience in Vo-Ag laboratories.
_____ Other (specify) _____

FOLLOW-UP LETTER

Tennessee Technological University
Department of General Agriculture • School of Agriculture
Box 5095 • Cookeville, TN, 38505 • 615-528-3152 or 528-3153

MEMORANDUM

TO: Selected Teachers of Vocational Agriculture

FROM: Edwin E. Lamberth, Associate Professor of Agricultural Education

RE: A Study of Teacher Perceptions of Supervised Occupational Experience Programs in Tennessee

DATE: April 3, 1985

On February 1, 1985, I mailed to you a letter from Mr. Kenneth Mitchell, State Specialist for Agricultural Education, and a questionnaire concerning your perceptions of SOE programs in Tennessee. Did you complete and return the questionnaire? If so let me express my appreciation for your time and effort.

A few teachers have not completed the questionnaire. Would you please do so and return it to me as soon as possible. Your responses are essential if the study is to be meaningful.

Your prompt attention to this request will be greatly appreciated. Thanks for your help.